

WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPSPress Conference - February 21, 1963

QUESTION: Mr. President, some French newspapers seem to be convinced that there is a quid pro quo arrangement between Washington and Moscow on removal of troops and other matters. Could you indicate what sort of diplomatic leverage this government has used to bring about the troop withdrawal?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. I think on November 6th, in a letter to Mr. Khrushchev, I indicated that the continued presence of troops as well as the bombers were a matter of great concern to us, and he wrote back, as I said before, in November, saying that in due course or in due time that he planned to remove those troops which were necessary to the defense of the offensive weapons.

We have been back to him on this matter several times, most recently by Mr. Rusk and Mr. Dobrynin, and Saturday Mr. Dobrynin gave the message which has been already announced. So that we have kept at it, indicating that we believe it creates tension in the Caribbean and also makes it more difficult for us to adjust our other problems between the Soviet Union and the United States as long as this is being used as a military base by the Soviet Union.

WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPS

Press Conference - February 21, 1961

QUESTION: Mr. President, now that the Soviets apparently have agreed to remove some of their troops from Cuba, do you feel that you should press for the removal of the remainder of the Russian troops in view of the fact that if they leave without their weapons, that these weapons will fall into the hands of the Cubans themselves?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Well, I would think we have indicated very clearly that we would find it difficult to accept with equanimity a situation which continued Soviet troop presence in Cuba. I think we have made that very clear. There has been, as I said, a series of withdrawals of missiles, planes, and some men. We will have to wait and see now in the coming months, and we will continue to work on the matter as we have over the last four months.

SHRIMP BOAT INCIDENT

Press Conference - February 21, 1963

QUESTION: Mr. President, in view of the action of the Cuban MIG's in firing on this two-man shrimp boat, is the Government making an inquiry as to the possibility that this may have been the fate of the Sulphur Queen, the industrial tanker which left Beaumont on the 2nd of February and has not been heard from since the 3rd of February?

THE PRESIDENT: We have no information that that is the reason. Certainly, we would examine it, but we have no information.

[Handwritten signatures and initials]

SHALIMP TONK INCIDENT

Press Conference - February 21, 1963

QUESTION: Mr. President, today's incident, sir, has caused some people in Congress again to say that the rocket firing proves that the Soviet weapons in Cuba are not defensive. Will this incident cause the Administration to re-evaluate its definition between offensive and non-offensive weapons?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. I think we made that very clear. When we are talking about offensive weapons, we are talking about weapons which have the capacity to carry great damage in the United States, bombers, particularly missiles. A MIG, with its rather limited range, is not regarded ordinarily as an offensive weapon, and the attack which took place on this vessel, which was lying in the water and which did not, as I understand, carry any flag, was relatively -- it was 40 miles or so off the coast of Cuba. I don't think that that changes our definition.

SHIPPING BOAT INCIDENT

Press Conference - February 21, 1963

QUESTION: Mr. President, could you elaborate on what is meant by all necessary action to prevent attacks on our shipping by Cuba-based planes?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. I have asked the Department of Defense to make any necessary revisions in standing orders so as to insure that action will be taken against any vessel or aircraft which executes an attack against a vessel or aircraft of the United States on international waters in the Caribbean.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in the same vein, taking your announcement about the message from the Russians on removal of some of their troops and this incident involving the shipping boat which has produced some very loud reaction in Congress, including Speaker McCormack saying it is an act of aggression, Senator Russell advocating a "hot pursuit" policy, these two things together, how does it affect the net situation with Cuba? Are we better off or worse?

THE PRESIDENT: Better off or worse than when? Yesterday?

QUESTION: Than before the Russian message was received or before this fishing boat incident.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know whether these two incidents can be -- these two matters can be that closely linked. I think that we are very much interested in seeing the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Cuba and we will be watching the progress that is made in that area over the next three weeks.

I don't think we know the full reasons behind this attack on this vessel, whether it was a deliberate decision by the Cuban Government or a decision by the pilots involved. In any case, I think we made it very clear what our response will be and we would hope that this response would make any future attacks such as this unlikely.

QUESTION: Mr. President, does the fact that the note of protest was sent to the Cuban Government mean that the United States Government holds the Cubans accountable for the use of MIG's instead of the Russians?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. These planes came from Cuba and flew under a Cuban flag and, therefore, unless the Soviet Union should claim they were flying them, we would hold the Cubans responsible.

SHRIMP BOAT INCIDENT

Press Conference - February 21, 1963

QUESTION: Mr. President, would it be possible to say, sir, in the event of future attacks upon our shipping in the Carribean whether we would turn to the doctrine of hot pursuit?

THE PRESIDENT: I would prefer to leave our status as I have described it, and to make judgments as they come along. We have made it very clear now that the United States will take action against any vessel or plane which attacks our planes or vessels. But the details of those standing engagements, I think, can wait on events. But there will be an initial response. How far the pursuit would go, and all the rest is a matter which I think the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of State, we all might consider as the situation develops, and as we see whether today's action was an isolated incident, the result of a pilot decision, or was a deliberate decision by the Cuban Government which forecasts other attacks. I would think we have got a clearer pattern, then we could make a judgment on whether hot pursuit should be carried out to the shores of Cuba.

SHRIMP BOAT INCIDENT

Press Conference - February 21, 1963

QUESTION: Mr. President, the Defense Department announcement on the incident in the Florida Straits said simply that the MIG's fired near the shrimp boats.

THE PRESIDENT: That is correct.

QUESTION: And you used the term "attack." Did these MIG's attack the boat and miss or did they harass the boat?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a -- I don't think we have the answer to that question. I think the shots came within -- what? 40 yards of the boat. I would think, if you are on the boat, that is regarded as an attack, and whether they were trying to hit the boat or whether they were merely attempting to target practice -- all these things, I think, we will have to look at in the next day or so.